AN

ENQUIRY

INTO THE

Occasional Conformity

OF

DISSENTERS,

IN

Cases of Preferment.

WITH A

Preface to the Lord Mayor, Occasioned by his carrying the Sword to a Conventicle.

If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.
1 Kings 18. 21.

DUBLIN:
Reprinted by J. B. and S. P. at the Back of Dick's Coffee-House in *Skinner Row*, for *Jacob Milner*, Bookseller in *Essex-Street*.
MDCXCVIII.

AN ENQUIRY

INTO THE

Occasional Conformity

OF

DISSENTERS,

IN

Cases of Preferment.

WITH A

Preface to the Lord Mayor, Occasioned by his carrying the Sword to a Conventicle.

If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.
1 Kings 18. 21.

DUBLIN:

Reprinted by J. B. and S. P. at the Back of Dick's Coffee-House in Skinner-Row; for Jacob Milner, Bookseller in Essex-street,

MDCXCVIII.

07—1591

THE PREFACE.

My LORD,

I Know not that the following Sheets will at all affect Your Lordship, for I cannot say, That Your Lordship did Communicate with the Dissenters before, or does with the Church now; nor does it Import much whether you did either. The Discourse is not meant for a Satyr on Your Lordship, nor upon any Man else; neither has it any Double Aspect, but directly Points at the Fact, which whether it be a Crime or not, let their Consciences judge, who know themselves Guilty.

My Lord, the Step Your Lordship made into the Chair, had something in it of Surprize, and Your Management of it has more. The Figure Your Lordship made, when You were the Man whom the King delighted to Honour, was very Magnificent; and we find, that since that, Your Lordship does not bear the Sword in vain.

I bear Your Lordship Testimony, That I never heard any Man reflect, either on Your Lordship's Morals or Management, (since Your being Lord Mayor) save only in the Matter of Pinners-Hall: And since no body has opened their Mouths on Your Lordship's Behalf, I humbly crave leave to be Your Lordship's Advocate in one Point. One Principal Allegation against Your Lordship, is, That you forced the Pious Consciencious Mr. M—— to the Meeting-house, and there excus'd him, nolens volens, contrary to the true Intent and Meaning of an Act of Parliament, in that Case made and Provided, Entituled, An Act for Liberty of Conscience, &c. And that at the same time, Your Lordship caused the Sword (that very Individual Sword, that had the Honour to be carried so far before the King) even the City Sword of State, to be carried to a Conventicle or Meeting-house, call'd Pinners-Hall.

My Lord, I own the Fact in Your Lordship's behalf, that Your Lordship's Sword and Sword-Bearer was there; and I can find out but two Clauses in which Your Lordship can be charg'd with a Mistake.

One is in forcing that Good Man against his Conscience. Liberty of Conscience is a thing, that Gentleman, I confess, never was fond of. But since 'tis now become every Subjects right, 'tis hard Your Lordship should refuse it Mr. M——

But now, My Lord, I must crave the freedom to inform Your Lordship, That Mr. M——, and Your Lordship, are exactly under the same Predicaments as to Liberty; for if Your Lordship has, against his Will, oblig'd him to go to Pinners-Hall; Your Lordship seems in as large a measure to be impos'd upon, in being oblig'd to go to the Cathedral Worship of St. Paul's.

Till Your Lordship arriv'd at the Magnitude You now sit in, You never suffer'd Your self to be deprived of Your Liberty; and shall Your Power be Great in every thing, but in the Management of Your self.

My Lord, *either Your Profession before was Bad or Good; If it was Bad,* Your Lordship *does well to alter it, and would do better to do so wholly. If 'twas Good, why does* Your Lordship *alter it at all? But I beg leave of* Your Lordship *to consider how 'twas possible to be both Good and Bad too? That* Your Lordship *should Worship God one way in the Morning, and another in the Afternoon.* My Lord, *Your Elevated Station places You above the Fear of Man, and be that is above Fear, is above Shame. If Your former Profession was Good,* Your Lordship *need never be asham'd of it: If 'twas Bad, You need not be asham'd to mend it, for no wise Man is asham'd of growing wiser.*

Humane Politicks seldom agree with Nice Consciences; and if I could entertain such base Thoughts, as to believe Your Lordship *designs by this to gain Parties, and make both Your Friends; I would think it also needful to assure* Your Lordship, *that by it You will most effectually lose both Parties; but* Your Lordship *is wiser than to need that Admonition.* Your Lordship *never was a* Trimmer *in Your Life, and certainly You won't Trim it with Your Maker.*

I neither press Your Lordship *to go to* Church *or* Meeting, *but to use the Authority Man has given you to procure Your self the freedom of using the Judgment God has given You; That honest Mr. Sword-bearer may have his Liberty, and* Your Lordship *Your own.*

We were in hopes when Your Lordship *first appear'd in the Quire at* Paul's; *that you were effectually convinced of your former Error, as a Dissenter; and that Noble Quire should have been grac'd as its first Opening with so Noble a Convert, as* Your Lordship; *but since we find* Your Lordship *is pleased to practice such* Latitudinarian *Principles, as to be a* Conformist *in the Morning, and a* Nonconformist *before Night; it puts us upon considering what this new sort of a Religion that looks two ways at once, means.*

The following Sheets, if Your Lordship *should give Your self the trouble of reading them, will directly point out to* Your Lordship *what is meant by this blunt Preface. In short, That the* Church *or the* Meeting-house, *is the Place where* Your Lordship *may Worship, but that both* Church *and* Meeting-house, *at the same time, is preposterous, Derogatory to the Character of* Your Lordship's *Wisdom, a Scandal upon the Grandeur of the Principal Magistrate of the City; and a slight put upon God himself, as if* Your Lordship *were very indifferent which way You did it, and consequently, whether you did it at all, or not.*

Your Lordship *sits in a Chair of Great Authority, and the Respect due to You is Great, and your Example is very significant. Wherefore 'tis the Author's humble Request to* Your Lordship, *That you will be plea'd to consider, whether the Example* Your Lordship *now sets us, is such as You would really advise any body to follow, and if not, I have no more to say to the Matter; But that I am,*

Your Lordship's

Most Humble Servant,

Ond. Two, Three, Four.

A DISCOURSE UPON Occasional Conformity.

WHEN I review the Past Times, and look back upon the various Scenes, which they present us, as to Ecclesiastical Transactions within this Kingdom, there seems nothing more strange than the Turns we have had from Popish to Regal Supremacy, from the *Romish* Religion to Reform'd, from Reform'd back again to *Romish*, and then to Reform'd again, and so on through several Degrees of Reformation, and back again from those Degrees to the first Steps of Reformation, and then forward again.

King *Henry* the 8th, a Prince of a haughty Spirit, disdaining the Insolence with which his Predecessors were treated by the Popes, gave the first shock to the *Roman* Power in these Kingdoms. I won't say he acted from any Principles of Conscience, whatever his Ambition and Interest led him to pretend, but *that*, as it is in most Cases of Publick Revolutions, was the Gloss; however it was, having satisfy'd his Pride by subduing the Supremacy of the Pope, and Establishing his own; his Interest next guided him to the Suppression of Abbies and Monasteries; the horrible Vices which were protected, as well as practised in those Nests of Superstition, giving his pretence of Piety the larger Scope; and I'll for once be so free with the Character of that Prince, as to suppose what to me seems plain, that *neither This Religion, or That, were of much moment in his thoughts, but his Interest*, as the Sequel made plain, by the Seizure he made of the Revenues of the Church. And yet the Justice of Providence seem'd very conspicuous in that point, That those Houses who under the specious pretences of Religion and extraordinary Devotion, had amassed to themselves vast Revenues to the Impoverishing many Families, and in the mean time practised secretly most unheard-of Wickedness, should under the same pretence of Zeal and Piety be suppressed and impoverished by a Person, who meerly to serve his own Glory, triumph'd over them, pretending, *Jesu like, to show his Zeal for the Lord.*

Some

Some do assure us, That the Eyes of this Prince were really open'd as to the Point of Religion; and that had he liv'd longer, he wou'd most effectually have establish'd the Reformation in his time; but God, who gave him that light, *if he had it*, however he might accept his Intention, as he did that of *David*'s building his House, yet he reserv'd the Glory of the Performance to his Son.

King *Edward* the 6th, of whom wondrous things are spoken in all our *English* Writers, and more than we need suppose should be literally true, yet was, without doubt, a Prince of the strictest Piety, not only that ever reign'd, but that ever liv'd, perhaps, since the Days of *Josiah*, whose Parallel our Writers say he was.

The Reformation began in his hand; not but that the Protestant Religion had been receiv'd in *England* many years before, by the preaching of *John Wickliff*, *William Tindall*, and others, and had many Professors, and those such, who gallantly offered their Lives in defence of the Truth.

But it got but little ground; for Religion has but few Votaries, while all its Professors must also be Confessors, and while Exile or Martyrdom is all the present prospect of Advantage to be got by it.

None will dare to be Dissenters in times of Danger, but such whose Consciences are so awaken'd that they dare not be otherwise.

But in the Hands of this young Prince, the great work was begun, and in a shorter time than could be imagin'd, was finish'd and establish'd; the *Romanists* fled or conform'd; for we find but very few had any Inclination to Martyrdom if it had been put upon them. Some indeed to show the Nature of their Religion, *Pleaded for Baal, and rebell'd*, stirring up the Ignorant People to Murther their *Gideon* for throwing down the *Altars of* Baal; but like the *Ephraimites* of old, their *Shibboleth* was their undoing.

God, who thought fit to discover the Levity of those who had only Conform'd, and not Reform'd, who, *in exemplum Regis*, had took up this as they wou'd have done any Religion, and also for the Tryal and Glory of his Church, suffer'd all this great Fabrick, *however of his own Working*, to be overthrown at the Death of this good King and a Deluge of Cruelty and Popery overwhelm'd the People in the Reign of the Queen his Sister.

But Popery found more Dissenters than the Reformation had done, and the Impression Religion had made on the Minds of those who had sincerely Embrac'd it, was not so easily Defac'd as the pretended Reformation of Others; for the Glosses Men had put on their Actions, only as a Cover from common Observation, was soon discover'd, when the Safety of owning their Old Principles render'd those Outsides no longer needful; but where the True Religion had got footing in the Mind, it was still the same, whatever Alterations of Times might make it Dangerous; *and yet all People did not* fly, but some being perfecuted in one City, fled to another, and *Germany* especially was a Sanctuary for the Distressed *English* Protestants, that Country having been before-hand with us in the Reformation.

'Twas

'Twas here that our Exil'd Clergy having Convers'd with the Learned Reformers abroad, and particularly with *John Calvin*, found, that tho' they were Reform'd indeed from the Grofs Errors of Popery and Superſtition, there was yet ſeveral things which might be further and further Reform'd; and being willing to arrive to the greateſt Perfection they were capable of in Religion, (that as near as poſſible they might purſue the Great Example of Chriſt Jeſus, whoſe Name they profeſs'd, and for whom they cou'd moſt gloriouſly die), they corrected in themſelves thoſe things which they ſaw needful, and by Letters to their Brethren in *England* communicated their Opinions, with their Reaſons, exhorting them to go on unto perfection as they had begun.

Some of the moſt Zealous for Piety and Holineſs of Life, rejected this Motion; and Others as Zealous and Pious, clos'd with it; and the Diſputes were carried ſo far ſometimes, as to invade the Charity of one another; an humble Acknowledgment of which you have in a moſt Chriſtian Reconciling Letter from Biſhop *Ridley* to Biſhop *Hooper*, two of the moſt Glorious Triumphant Martyrs that ever confeſt the Truth of Chriſt at the Stake.

For the preſent, the Fire of the Perſecution, (as the Greater Light obſcures the Leſs), extinguiſh'd that of Diſſention. But when Queen *Elizabeth* reſcu'd the Proteſtant Religion, and the Church enjoy'd its Peace again, the Debate reviv'd: But the firſt Eſtabliſhment of King *Edward* obtain'd ſo on the Minds of Men, that the further Reformation was rejected; the other Party being not at all convinc'd, tho' over-rul'd, ſubmitted their Perſons to the Laws, but not their Opinion; affirming, "That 'twas the Duty of every Chriſtian, to "endeavour to ſerve God with the greateſt Purity of Worſhip that was poſ- "ſible; and that this was the Pureſt Worſhip which came neareſt to the Di- "vine Inſtitution, which they believ'd the Eſtabliſh'd Liturgy did not, and "therefore in Conſcience they muſt be Diſſenters.

It muſt be own'd, That the Original Authors of theſe Diſputes were Learned, Devout, and ſingularly Pious, ſtrict in Converſation to excels, *if that be poſſible*, and from thence, in a ſort of happy Deriſion, were call'd *Puritans*; of whom I ſhall ſay nothing, but leave for a Record the laſt Speech of a Famous Forreigner, who had ſeen the way of living among thoſe Diſſenters, and ſpeaking of the Words of *Balaam*, *Let me dye the death of the Righteous, and let my laſt end be like his*, cry'd Out,

Sit Anima Mea cum Puritanis Anglicanis.

I ſhall not take upon me to obſerve the Difference between theſe Primitive Diſſenters and Our Preſent, which is too plain; nor to diſpute the Subſtance of the Point in Debate between them and the Eſtabliſht National Church.

I shall only observe, That the Reasons for the present Dissenters Separation from the Establisht Church, are said to be exactly the same they were then, and the present Dissenters are the Successors of those first, as the present Conformists are the Successors of the first Reformers under King *Edward* the 6th, and Queen *Elizabeth*.

I must acknowledge, that it fares with the Church of *England*, and with the Dissenters both, as it has always far'd with Christ's Church in the whole World; That while Suppresst and Persecuted, their Professors were few, and their Profession more severe; but when a Religion comes to be the Mode of the Country, so many painted Hypocrites get into the Church, who are not by their Voices to be distinguish'd, that Guile is not to be seen, till it arrive to Apostacy. The whole Eccleſiastical History, from the first Century of the Christian Church, is full of Instances to confirm this, That the Prosperity of the Church of Christ has been more fatal to it, than all the Persecution of its Enemies.

I am now brought down to the present Time, when the Dissenting Protestant is sheltered by the laws, and protected from the Violence which he suffered in the Late Reigns, under the Arbitrary Commands of such State-Ministers who strove to dash the whole Protestant Interest to pieces by its own weight: and nothing is more apparent to those who are any thing acquainted with the late Management of Affairs in this Land, than that the Court used both Parties alternately, as Policy and occasion directed, to Suppress and Destroy one another; that the whole House, *which being so divided, cou'd not stand*, might at last fall of it self.

But our Eyes are at last open'd, and the Name of Protestant is now the common Title of an *Englishman*, and the Church of *England* extends her Protection to the Tender Consciences of her Weaker Brethren, knowing that all may be Christians, tho' not alike inform'd; and the Dissenter extends his Charity to the Church of *England*, believing that in his due time *God shall reveal even this unto them*. If this is not, I wish this were the Temper of both Parties; and I am sure it is already the Temper of some of each Side, and those few are of the Wisest, most Pious, and most Judicious.

But while Frailty and Infirmity is an Essential to Humanity, and Pride and Hypocrisy are the two regnant Vices of the Church, this Good Spirit cannot be Universal, and we do not expect it.

But there is a sort of Truth which all men owe to the Principles they profess; and generally speaking, all men pay it; a *Turk* is a *Turk* zealously and entirely; an Idolater is an Idolater, and *will serve the Devil to a tittle*: None but Protestants halt between *God and Baal*; Christians of an Amphibious Nature, that have such Prepostrous Consciences, that can believe one Way of Worship to be right, and yet serve God another way themselves; *This is a strange thing in Israel*. The whole History of Religions in the World do not shew such a Case: 'Tis like a Ship with her Sails hal'd

some

ſome back, and ſome full: 'Tis like a Workman, that builds with one Hand, and pulls down with t'other: 'Tis like a Fiſherman, that catches Fiſh with one hand and throws them into the Sea with another: 'Tis like every thing that ſignifies nothing. To ſay a man can be of two Religions, is a Contradiction, unleſs there be two Gods to worſhip, or he has two Souls to ſave.

Religion is the Sacred Profeſſion of the Name of God; *ſerving him, believing in him, expecting from him*; and like the God it refers to, 'tis in one and the ſame Object, one and the ſame thing perfectly indiviſible and inſeparable; there is in it no Neuter Gender, no Ambigous Article, *God or Baal*; Mediums are impoſſible.

As to the different Modes and Ways, which are the Circumſtantials of this ſacred thing I Call Religion; I won't ſay, but that as Ships take different Courſes at Sea, yet to the beſt of their Skill, keeping to the direct Rules of Navigating by the Compaſs, they may arrive at the ſame Port; ſo Chriſtians taking different Methods in the ſerving this God, yet going to the beſt of their Judgments by the direct Rules of the Scripture, may arrive at the ſame Heaven; *but this is nothing at all to the Caſe*; for no Ship would arrive at any Port, that ſailed two ways together, *if that were poſſible*; nor no Man can ſerve One God, and at the ſame time hold two Opinions. There is but one Beſt, and he that gives God *two Beſts*, gives him the Beſt and the Worſt, and one ſpoils t'other, till both are good for nothing.

I have ſaid already, that both the Church of *England*, and the Diſſenter, ſuffer in their Reputation for the mixt Multitude of their Members, which is occaſion'd by their preſent Proſperity: If a Third Party were to Tyrannize over them both, we ſhould ſee then who were *Profeſſors*, and who were *Confeſſors*; but now it cannot be: Wherefore, I think 'twere well to put both Sides in mind of one thing, which they are bound mutually to obſerve; and that is, That *the Perſonal Miſcarriages of any particular Perſon or Member, is not really any Reflection upon the Religion they profeſs*, nor ought not to be ſo accounted, unleſs it be where ſuch Miſcarriages are the direct Dictates of the Doctrines they Teach; and thus I would be underſtood in the preſent Caſe. Wherefore I ſhall give my Eſſay as to what I underſtand a Real Diſſenting Proteſtant is, or ought to be.

He who Diſſents from an Eſtabliſh'd Church on any account, but from a real Principle of Conſcience, is a Politick, not a Religious Diſſenter. To explain my ſelf, He who Diſſents from any other Reaſons, but ſuch as theſe, That he firmly believes the ſaid Eſtabliſhed Church is not of the pureſt Inſtitution, but that he can really ſerve God more agreeable to his Will, and that accordingly 'tis his Duty to do it ſo, *and no otherwiſe*. Nay, he that cannot Dye, or at leaſt deſire to do ſo, rather than Conform, *ought to Conform. Schiſm* from the Church of Chriſt is, doubtleſs, a great Sin, and if I can avoid it, I ought to avoid it, but if not, the Cauſe of that Sin carries the Guilt with it.

But if I ſhall thus Diſſent, and yet at the ſame time Conform; by Conform-

ng I deny my Diſſent being lawful, or by my Diſſenting I damn my Conform-ng as ſinful.

Nothing can be lawful and unlawful at the ſame time; if it be not lawful for me to Diſſent, I ought to Conform; but if it be unlawful for me to Conform, I muſt Diſſent; ſeveral Opinions may at the ſame time conſiſt in a Country, in a City, in a Family, but not in one entire Perſon, *that is impoſſible.*

To come to the point; there are Diſſenters who have ſeparated from the Church of *England*, and join'd in Communion with Diſſenting Churches or Congregations. They have appear'd Zealous, Conſcientious, and Conſtant; have born the Reproaches and Inconveniencies of their Party, nay, ſuffer'd Perſecution, and Loſs of Eſtates and Liberty for the Cauſe: And who could have ſo little Charity as to doubt the Sincerity of their Profeſſion? And yet theſe Perſecuted, Suffering Diſſenters, to make themſelves room in the Publick Advancements, and Glittering Gawdy Honours of the Age, ſhall Conform to that which they refus'd under all thoſe Diſadvantages to do before. And which is worſe than all this; hear O Heavens! as ſoon as the preſent Honour is attain'd, the preſent Advantage made, they return to the former Circumſtance again, and are freely receiv'd, *a double Crime*, as having done no Evil.

I know not, I profeſs, what theſe Perſons can ſay for themſelves, and therefore cannot pretend to Anſwer their Objections; but I cannot omit one Anſwer which ſome People give for them, *viz. That this is no Conformity in Point of Religion, but done as a Civil Action*, in Obedience to the Laws of the Land, which have made it a neceſſary Characteriſtick Quality, for admittance into Publick Employments, which they think it their Duty to accept, in order to ſerve their Country, which they doubly perform by executing thoſe Offices to the Publick Intereſt, and by Excluding thoſe who would otherwiſe get into thoſe Places, and betray their Country and their Liberties.

I have never met with any conſiderable Excuſe made for this faſt and looſe Game of Religion, but this, and this I deſire to conſider a little particularly.

1. *That this is no Conformity in Point of Religion, but done as a Civil Action.* How this can be poſſible, remains to be determined. 'Tis true, the Morality of an Action conſiſts in its End; but I cannot conceive that an Action purely and originally Religious, ſuch as the Solemn Ordinances of God's Worſhip, can be made Civil Actions by any End, Deſign, Will, or Intention of Man whatſoever. 'Tis true, an Oath, which is a calling God to witneſs, is an Action both Civil and Religious, but ſtill that was appointed and inſtituted to that end, as is expreſly noted, *Heb.* *Naaman*'s bowing in the Houſe of *Rimmon*; to which the Prophet anſwered, *Go in peace*, which is underſtood as a permiſſion, is a thing ſtill different; for *Naaman* only bowed for the Conveniency or State of the King, at the ſame time publickly diſowning the Worſhip, as *Interpreters are of Opinion*; beſides, bowing the Head, though it may be a cuſtomary Act of Worſhip at that place, yet is no Act confin'd to Worſhip only, and inſtituted and directed ſo by the God who is Worſhipped, but is an Act us'd

in

in Common Salutations. Thus we kneel to God, and to the King; but Sacraments are things appropriated by the Divine Inſtitution of God himſelf, as things which have no other Signification or Import but what is Divine: Had *Naaman* deſir'd to be excuſed in offering Sacrifices to the Idol *Rimmon*, the Prophet would hardly have bid him go in peace. Some Actions are not Civil or Religious, as they are Civilly or Religiouſly perform'd, but as they are Civil or Religious in themſelves; for ſome Religious Actions are ſo entirely ſuch, that they cannot without a horrid Invaſion of the Sovereignty of the Inſtitutor be appropriated to any other uſe, and ſuch are in eſpecial manner, the Two Sacraments inſtituted by Chriſt; ſuch was, before Chriſt, the Sacrifices by Fire; And the Judgments of God on *Nadab* and *Abihu*, for attempting to offer Sacrifice with ſtrange Fire, ſtands as a terrible Inſtance of what we ought to think is the Will of God in this matter.

Further, ſpeaking directly of the Sacraments, Are they not the ſame thing, though differently Adminiſtred in the Eſtabliſh'd Church, or in a Diſſenting Church; and how can you take it as a Civil Act in one place, and a Religious Act in another? This is *playing Bopeep* with God Almighty, and no Man can tell of them when they are about a Civil Action, and when about a Religious. But to anſwer this pretence at once, Sacraments as Sacraments are Religious Acts, and can be no other; if you do not take it as a Sacrament, the Caſe differs; but how can you ſay you do not take it as a Sacrament; an Oath is to be taken in the Senſe of the Impoſer; and a Sacrament, which is a Recognition of the moſt Sacred of Oaths, muſt be alſo taken in the Senſe of the Impoſer; if the Perſon Adminiſtring declar'd at the Adminiſtration, *He did not give it as a Sacrament, but only gave you a bit of Bread, and a draught of Wine as a Friend*, or the like, this was ſomething; but can a Miniſter deliver the Bread to you, and ſay, *The Body of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, &c. and you kneeling with Reverence take it as ſuch, and repeat the Reſponſes at the Communion, and ſay *Amen* to the Prayer, and ſay 'tis a Civil Action. This is ſuch Bantering with Religion, as no Modeſt Chriſtian can think of without Horror.

2. Another Part of the Apology is, That without it they cannot be admitted into Publick Places of Truſt; and if they are not admitted, ſuch will get in as will betray their Country and Liberties, and they do it purely to ſecure their Country, which they think their Duty.

Theſe are Patriots that will damn their Souls to ſave their Country; a ſort of a Publick Spirit hardly to be found in the World, and indeed a Non-entity in it ſelf; for 'tis a Miſtake; the Gentlemen who make this Anſwer, put the Caſe wrong. For I would deſire ſuch to Anſwer a few Queſtions.

If the Service of their Country be ſo dear to them, pray why ſhould they not chuſe to expoſe their Bodies and Eſtates for that Service, rather than their Souls; the Penalty of the Law in accepting the Publick Employments

is

wholly Pecuniary; the difference lies here, *they chuse the Treſpaſſing on their Conſciences, before the hazard of their Eſtates*, as the leaſt Evil; for 'tis plain, any Man who will ſuffer the Penalty, or run the Riſque of it, which is all one, may excuſe the Conformity: For the Law does not ſay you ſhall ſo and ſo Conform, but if you do not Conform, you ſhall incur ſuch and ſuch Penalties; any Man that will incur the Penalty, may commit the Treſpaſs.

So that all this Compliance is not, to be admitted to Places, that they may be able to ſerve their Country, but to ſave the Five hundred pounds, and other Penalties of that Act.

2. Why, if we believe the Power of God to be Omnipotent, ſhould we imagine that he is not able to protect our Country and Liberties, without our perpetrating ſo wicked an Act to ſecure them, *as doing Evil that Good may come*, which is expreſly forbidden?

But we are told again, This is in it ſelf no Sinful Act, and therefore it is not doing Evil. This is tacitly anſwered before; tho 'tis not a Sinful Act in it ſelf, *yet 'tis either a Sinful Act in a Diſſenter, or elſe his Diſſenting before was a Sinful Act.* For if he is ſatisfied he does well in Conforming now, why did he not before? There is but one Anſwer for that, which is, He is otherwiſe convinced; to which I reply, if that were true, he would then as a Convert continue in this New Communion; but 'tis evident the ſame Perſons return immediately to the former Profeſſion as Diſſenters, and they can have no ſuch Excuſe, unleſs it be, that they were convinc'd, and reconvinc'd, and then convinc'd again.

Some have the Folly to argue againſt the Law it ſelf, as a moſt Notorious Impoſition upon the Conſciences of Men, by making the Sacred Inſtitutions of Chriſt a Drudge to Secular Intereſt, and a Cauſe of Mens Sins, by leading them into Temptation. I could ſay enough to vindicate that part, tho I am no more reconcil'd to that Law, than other Men, but 'tis remote to our Argument: 'Tis an Act of Parliament, and what is ſo, is of every Man's own doing, and therefore 'tis juſt every one ſhou'd comply with the Terms, or ſuffer the Penalty; but here is no Penalty, if no Crime; *if no Preferments are ſought, no Honours accepted, there is no Crime*; if Self-denial was as practicable as Self-advancement, here is no need of the Crime. So that they who do this, *ſeek the Crime, that is the firſt Sin; then Mortgage their Conſciences to avoid the Penalty*, and ſo add one Sin to another. But we are told by ſome, 'tis not againſt their Conſciences, they hope both Parties are Good Chriſtians; there are Differences between them which they don't underſtand nor meddle with, and their Conſciences are very well ſatisfied to Communicate with either.

I would ask ſuch, if their Conſciences would ſerve to Communicate with the Church, why did they Separate? For Communicating with the Diſſenter, is not an Occaſional or Caſual Thing, but an open declar'd breaking off

from

from the Church Establisht. Now no Man can be said to separate from, and join to a thing at the same time; if your Conscience is satisfied in Joyning, it cannot be satisfied in Separating, unless you can suppose your Conscience to be satisfied and dissatisfied both together. If you have a Conscience of any Religion at all, it must be of some Religion or other; if of this, it cannot be of that; if of that, it cannot be of this: To Dissent and Approve, are different Acts, and can never be fixt upon the same Object at the same time: as for a Man, Passively Religious, that can Communicate any where, that Man may from the same Principle, and with far less guilt, Communicate no where, for such a Man, in down-right *English*, has prostituted the little Religion he had, if *ever he had any*, to his Interest, and may be *Turk*, *Jew*, *Papist*, or any thing.

The latter part of the Charge leads me to consider another Point, which relates to the Assemblies of the Dissenters, who admit, and by consequence approve this way of proceeding. I do not pretend to examine by what Methods such particular Churches do proceed. And I would be as tender as possible in making Reflections. I wish they would be as Charitable in censuring this Reproof.

I do think, with Submission, 'tis impossible to prove that any Person, whose Case the foregoing Paragraph reaches, can be receiv'd again into Church-Communion in a Dissenting Assembly upon any other Terms, *than as a Penitent*. I have heard of some, who have been said to have leave from their Ministers for this Matter; *if so*, they have assum'd some *Dispensing Authority*, which I believe does not appertain to the Ministerial Function, nor is not contain'd in the Mission of our Saviour. But I do not affirm, That any such thing has been really allow'd.

As to the Relation of Churches, and the Members thereof, one to another, as the Dissenters now Establish them; I am sure, the allowance of any Member in a Promiscuous Communion with the Church of *England* and the Dissenter at the same time, is not pretended to be allow'd, nor is it consistent with it self. 'Tis Prepostrous, and Excentrick, and is Destructive of the very Foundation of the Dissenters Principles, as is already noted, concerning Schisms in the Church. In this Case, Charity can heal nothing, nor help nothing; 'tis of absolute necessity that one Man be but of one side, at one and the same time. Either the Conformist will marr the Dissenter, or the Dissenter will marr the Conformist. For if I shall be admitted into the Communion of the Dissenter, and of the Church together; then the Dissenter must have some other Reason for being a Dissenter, than Purity of Worship.

Methinks Men should seem what they are; if a Man Dissent from the Church, let him do so; and his Principle being well-grounded for his Dissent, let him hold it; if not well-grounded, let him leave it; if he cannot

tempt suffer one way, let him suffer another; and why should we not be as honest to God as our Country.

The Motives to serve our Country are strong, but there are ways to do it without such a Violation of all our Principles and Profession; if not, trust God's Providence with the Issue, who never wants Agents to preserve and deliver his People when his time is at hand; and you can have small hope to expect that the Office and Trust you shall Execute, shall receive any Assistance from his Providence, when the first Step into it, is made by offering the greatest Affront to his Honour, and committing the vilest Act of Perfidy in the World.

But if the gay Prospect of a Great Place, tempt any Person beyond the Power that God's Grace is pleas'd to Assist him with, *in that way let him abide*, and not be re-admitted, because of his Gold Ring and Fine Apparel, without a Penitent Acknowledgment. The Dissenters in *England*, can never pretend to be Dissenters upon the mere Principle of Purity of Worship, as I have related in the beginning of this Discourse, if such shall be receiv'd as blameless into their Communion, who have deserted them upon the occasion of Preferment, and have made the Sacred Institutions of Christ Jesus, become Pimps to their Secular Interest, and then wipe their Mouths, and sit down in the Church and say, *They have done no Evil.*

'Tis also an Intolerable Affront to the Church of *England*, reflecting upon its Doctrine as well as Practice; To make use of the Church for a *Cover* to defence them against the Laws, at the same time continuing to disown its Communion, as a thing not fit to be continued in.

And yet the Church of *England* is in the right to receive such of the Dissenters as shall come to them, without the Ceremony of Recognition, because it is agreeable to the Notion of a National Church, which they profess to be. But Dissenters are bound to justify their Separation from them, or else their whole Constitution falls to the Ground. Now, how a Separation and a Conformity are Consistent, is to me an Inexplicable Riddle.

I question not here the Lawfulness of the Dissenters Separation, it is not the business of this Discourse to define it; and I am as careful as I can in making Reflections upon either; but I am bold to affirm, That no Dissenting Church can with lawful Cause Separate from the Church of *England*, Establish Private Churches or Communions, and at the same time allow the Members to Conform to the Establish't Church too. This is inconsistent, and one must destroy the other. From whence I think it becomes the Dissenters, if they would maintain the Doctrine they teach, if they would have us believe they Dissent purely on the honest Principles of Conscience, and Purity of Worship, with such a one, *No, not to Eat.* And it is not sufficient that the Offender be a Lord Mayor, or any Greater Person, unless he would be Lord Mayor without a Breach of the Sacred Relation he had entred into, he should be dealt with in that Case, as the meanest Member of such a Society.

On

On the other hand, if a Man be call'd upon to be a Magistrate, and has Courage enough to follow the Impartial Dictates of his Conscience, a Query lies before him, What shall he do?

The Case is plain; *Either refuse the Honour, or run the Risque*; the first indeed is the plainest and easiest Way, and the Ground of it is good, for he whose Conscience Dictates to him that the Terms are Sinful, may refuse the Call; for Preferments and Honours are a Bait that some have refus'd on meer Points of Speculative Philosophy; and 'tis hard, Christianity shou'd not carry a Man as far. Well, but *perhaps a Man has a mind to be a Sheriff and Lord Mayor*, and is a Dissenter; or perhaps he really thinks 'tis his indispensible Duty to serve his Country, if he is call'd to that, or the like Office; or perhaps he thinks 'tis a Duty he owes his Family, to advance his Children, and the like, and he is a Profest Dissenter; What shall he do? Let him boldly run the Risque, or openly and honestly Conform to the Church, and neither be asham'd of his Honour, nor of his Profession; such a Man all Men will value, and God will own: He need not fear carrying the Sword to a Conventicle, or bringing the Conventicle to his own House: But to make the matter a Game, to dodge Religions, and go in the Morning to Church, and in the Afternoon to the Meeting, to Communicate in private with the Church of *England*, to save a Penalty, and then go back to the Dissenters and Communicate again there: This is such a Retrograde Devotion, that I can see no Colour of pretence for in all the Sacred Book.

I have heard, indeed, that some, who are Ministers of Dissenting Churches do, or did at the same time Communicate with the Church of *England*. I do not dispute how far a Minister may Conform as a Lay-man, tho' he cannot as a Clergy-man; but how any Dissenting Minister can Conform as a Lay-man, and at the same time execute a Pastoral Charge over a Congregation, whom he teaches to separate from the Church in a Lay-Communion, I cannot imagine.

'Tis not as I have already noted, Conformity or Non-conformity, that I am discoursing; but 'tis Conformity and Nonconformity at the same time, in one and the same Person, *that is the Point*; and doing this for a Secular End, to save a Penalty, and Privately; and then, as being asham'd of it, to go back and sit down as not having done it at all; and a Church Society admitting this without taking notice of it. These are the Contradictions I insist upon, and rather wish, than expect to see rectified.

FINIS.